Design Resource

History of Graphic Arts in India

An Overview of the Indian Legacy of Graphic Design

by
Aman Rupesh Xaxa
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-arts-india

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

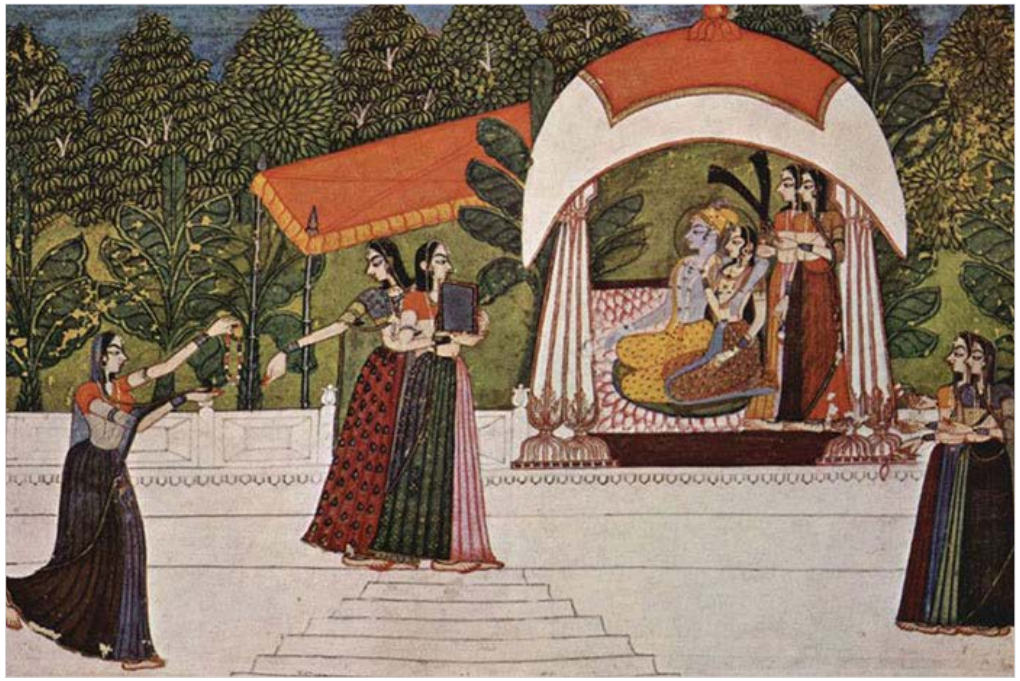
Introduction

The term graphic design was termed by William Addison Dwiggins as early as 1922 but, it was not in much use until after World War II. Prior to that Graphic Designers were referred as commercial artists.

Graphic Design is part of the art that consists of architecture, product, fashion and interior designing. Graphic design-like activities span the history of humankind: From the caves of Bhimbetka to the miniatures of Mughal at the time and now the most recent identities for various brands. In both this lengthy history and in the relatively recent explosion of visual communication in the 20th and 21st centuries, there is some what a blurring distinction and over-lapping of advertising art, graphic design and fine art.

The Project, "History of Graphic Arts in India" would be an overview of the vast legacy of Graphic Design starting from the cave arts and culminating on to the recent works done in the recent years.

The Project starts off with paintings in the years gone by then onto new contemporary ones and then finally onto the digital form. The latter half of the project is for the designs done mostly in digital media by independent artists and designers.



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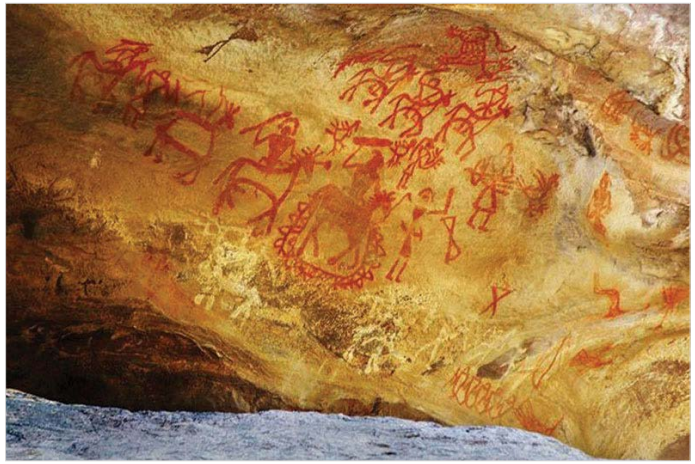
1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Paintings

The rock paintings of prehistoric times are one of the earliest Indian paintings. The petroglyphs (also called rock engravings) found in places like Bhimbetka are older than 5500 BC. The Indian paintings of 7th century with carved pillars of Ellora are one of the finest examples of such works. Cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora caves appeared later on. These paintings whose purpose was religious in the beginning; had developed gradually over the period of time with mixture of cultures and traditions. Later taught in various schools, these paintings had come up with various styles and patterns of their own.

Bhimbetka Rock Art - 30,000 years Old:
Situated in Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh, India, 'Bhimbetka Caves' are one of the World heritage sites. These caves rock art is considered as the clues for the existence of human life. The markings on the caves are said to be almost 30,000 years old. The paintings depict the time and lives of the people who lived in the caves. These include scenes of childbirth, dancing, drinking hunting, and religious rites such as burials.



Bhimbetka rock shelters are approximately 30,000 years old and date back to the Palaeolithic Age.
[Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5d/Bhimbetka_Cave_Paintings.jpg/800px-Bhimbetka_Cave_Paintings.jpg]

Bhimbetka caves from Bhopal.
[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:View_of_Bhimbetka,_World_Heritage_site,_Bhopal.jpg]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Bhimbetka caves paintings.
[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bhimbetka.JPG]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Ajanta Caves Frescos - 2nd Century BC:
One of the oldest frescoes of historical period had been preserved in Ajanta Caves from 2nd century BC. The paintings had survived till date in-spite of the climatic conditions. More than 20 locations can be found in India that shows paintings and traces of ancient art till early medieval times (up to 8th - 10th century AD). The most significant frescoes are found in the Ajanta, Bagh, Ellora, and Sittanavasal caves. The Jataka tales (stories of the Buddha' life in former existences as Bodhisattva) are seen depicted in the walls of the caves. The narrative episodes are depicted one after another although not in a linear order.

Ajanta frescos
[Image Source]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Chola Frescoes - 2nd Century:
The Chola Paintings were discovered in 1931 within the passage of the Brihadisvara Temple in India. The dark passage of the corridor and the walls on either side are covered with two layers of paintings from floor to ceiling. The technology used in doing these paintings is 'Frescoes' - a technique of mural painting drawn on freshly laid lime plaster.

Chola Fresco of Dancing girls. Brihadisvara Temple c. 1100
[Image Source]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Manuscripts:
A Manuscript is written information that is created by one or more people. These are not defined by their contents which may combine writing, mathematical calculations, maps, explanatory figures or illustrations. A manuscript can be in a form of book, scrolls etc. Some may be enriched with pictures, decorations at the border, engrossed initial letters etc. Below is Manuscript Illustration of the Kurukshetra War in Ancient India.

Manuscript Illustration of the Kurukshetra War in Ancient India
[Image Source]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Kerala Mural Paintings - 9th-12th Century:
Kerala mural paintings are frescos that mostly show mythology and legends drawn on the walls of temples and churches in South India, mostly in Kerala. Most of the ancient churches, temples and palaces in Kerala, South India, display the tradition of mural paintings which dates back to 9th to 12th centuries CE.

Kerala Mural Painting

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Mughal Paintings - 16-19th Century:
It's a particular style of South Asian painting which mostly has miniatures as single work or book illustrations. The type of painting that developed largely in the court of the Mughal Empire during 16-19th centuries had influences from Hindu, Jain, and Buddhism. It had emerged from Persian miniature paintings.

Mughal Painting

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Rajput Paintings -18th Century:
A style of Indian painting which was also known as Rajasthani Painting, was flourished and evolved during 18th century in the royal courts of Rajputana, India. It's derived from Persian miniature and Mughal painting. The painting styles of each Rajput kingdom was distinct but did had few common features.

An 18th century Rajput painting by the artist Nihâl Chand.

Design Resource

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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/paintings

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Mysore Paintings - 1336-1565 AD:
The distinct school of Mysore painting emerged from this legacy around the time of the reign of the Vijayanagar Kings 1336-1565 A.D.

Mysore Painting.

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Tanjore Paintings - 1600 AD:
This art which dates back to 1600 AD has mostly form of classical South Indian paintings from town of Thanjavur. These are known for showing their richness, vivid colors and compact composition in paintings. Nayakas of Thanjavur encouraged art—chiefly, classical dance and music—as well as literature, both in Telugu and Tamil.

Tanjore Painting

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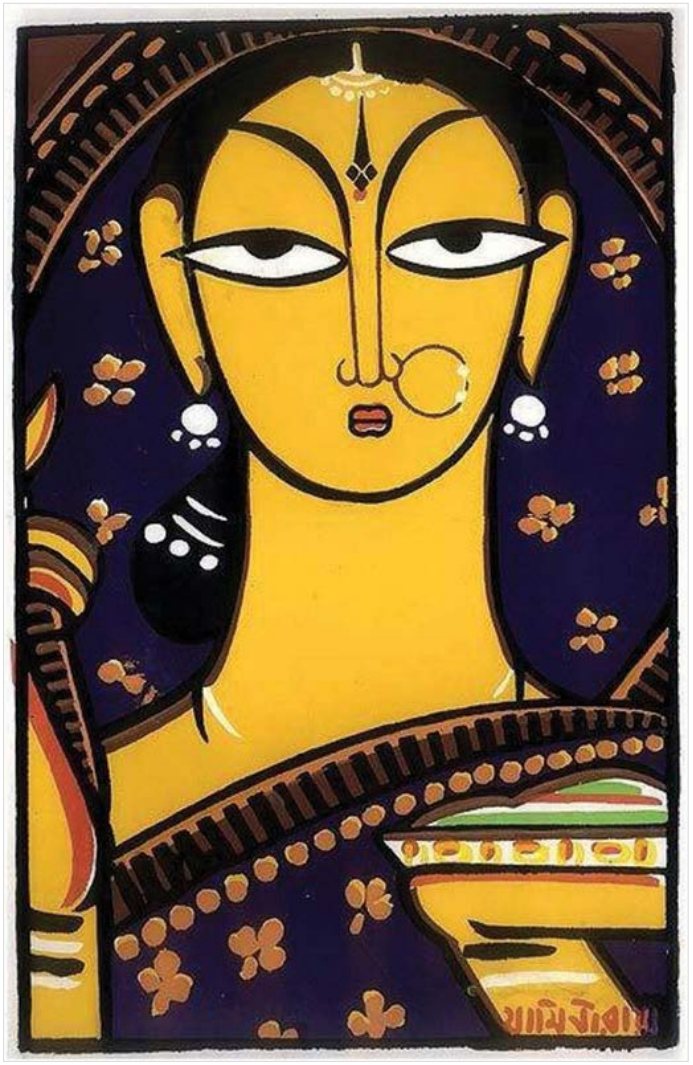
Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/paintings

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Bengal Paintings - Early 20th Century:
The Bengal School of Art that flourished in India during British era in the early 20th century had influential art and a style of Indian painting that originated in Bengal.



Bengal Painting

Design Resource

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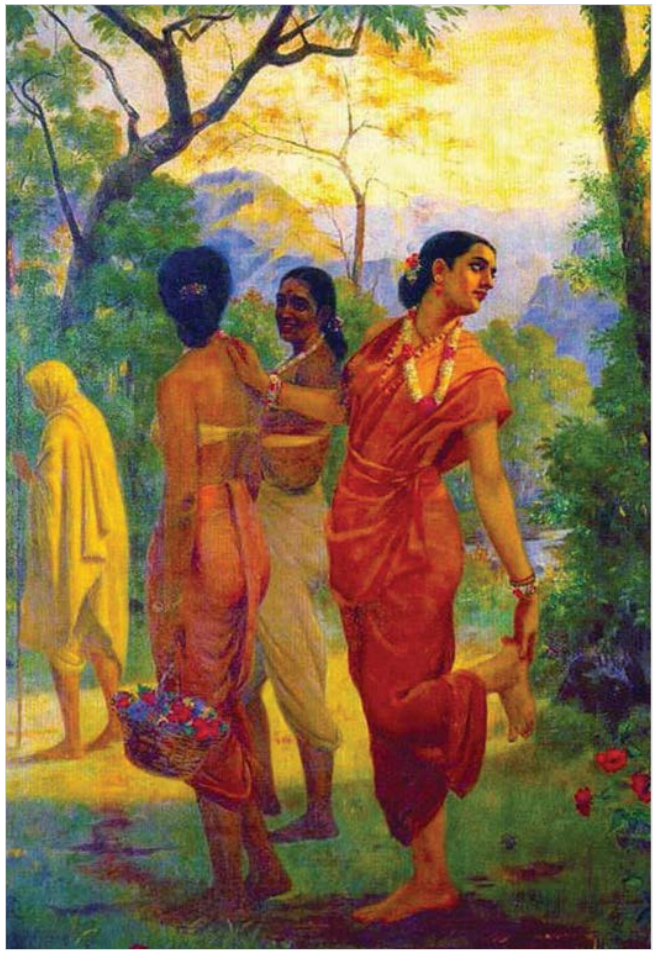
1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Modern Indian Paintings – Late 19th Century:
Modern Indian art is considered to have begun in late nineteenth century. One of the known artists of the time was Raja Ravi Varma (1848 - 1906). He made his debut into the world of art in 1873 by winning the first prize in Vienna Exhibition. He painted both – portraits and landscapes, introduced new elements, usage of canvas and oil colours. Most of his work showcased was based on Hindu epic stories and characters. Considered to be one of the finest painters for his work (Shakuntala) till then, was later criticized for being trivial.



Shakuntala

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by
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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/paintings

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Modern Indian Paintings 20th century:
F. N. Souza (1924 - 2002), the founder of the Progressive Artists Group of Bombay, was the first Indian artist to achieve recognition in the west post independence.

F.N. Souza – Balzac Etcetera

Design Resource

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https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/paintings

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Modern Indian Paintings 20th Century:
S.H. Raza (born 22nd February, 1922) – An Indian artist, living in France since 1950, whose works showcase mostly abstracts in oil or acrylic were filled with icons from Indian cosmology & its philosophy. His seminal work 'Saurashtra' was sold for Rs 16.3 crore at a Christie's auction making him one of the India's priciest modern artists.

Design Resource

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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/paintings

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Modern Indian Paintings 20th Century:
MF Husain (1915 - 2011) was known as "Picasso of India". One of the most famous, Indian-born Qatari artist /painter; has influenced whole generation of artists. He was associated with Indian modernism in the 1940s.

M F Hussain's Mother Teresa

Design Resource

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by
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IDC, IIT Bombay

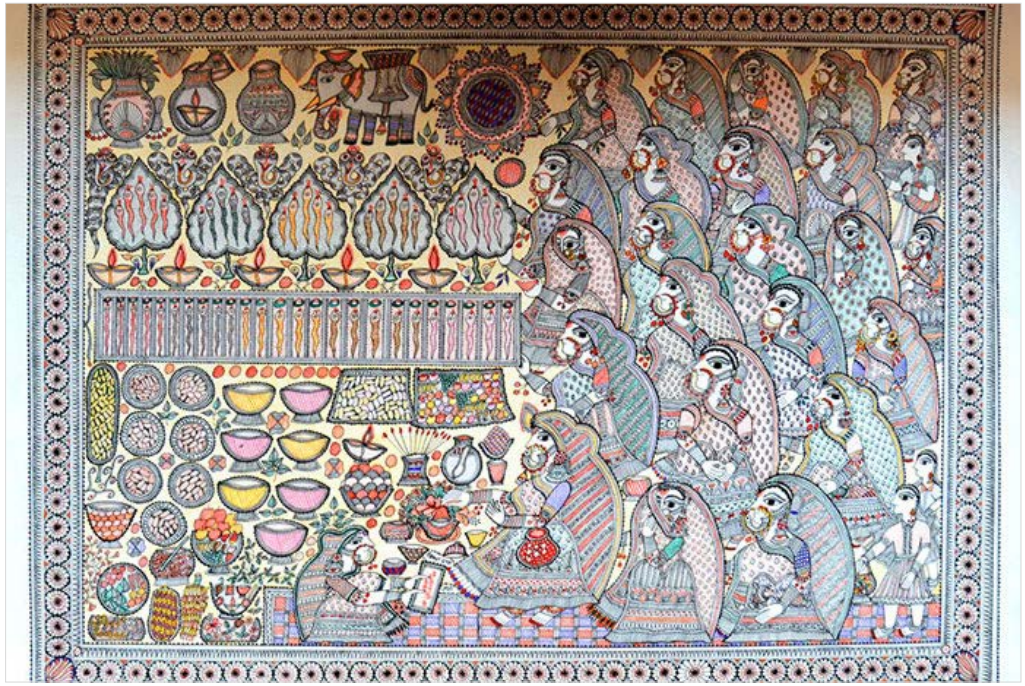
Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Folk and Tribal Art

The Indian subcontinent being such a vast one and bounded by natural forms such as rivers and mountains gave rise to a lot of tribes within the subcontinent each practicing their own unique culture. These tribes developed various forms of art, visual being one of them. These were mainly the depiction of their daily activities or the representation of the holy texts. Folk and tribal art flourished too in this era which is very difficult to date in a timeline due to it flourishing in the depths of the forests amidst unreachable human civilization.

Madhubani:
Madhubani painting or Mithila painting practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar state, India and the adjoining parts of Terai in Nepal, is one of the styles of Indian paintings. Characterized by eye-catching geometrical patterns these paintings are done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib-pens, and matchsticks, using natural dyes and pigments. There are paintings for each occasion and festival. For eg. occasion and festival like Birth, Marriage, holi, Upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony), , surya shasti, kali puja and Durga puja.



Madhubani painting.

Design Resource

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by
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https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Patachitra:
Originated from the temple of Jagannath at Puri in the 12th century; Patachitra painting is considered as important form of Oriya paintings. This style was developed under the patronage of the Ganga kings, and the kings of Bhoi dynasty. The purpose of these paintings was to popularize the cult of Jagannath to the millions of pilgrims visiting Puri. The patachitra paintings; however, may take a number of forms and may range from masks to even toys and models.

Patachitra painting.

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Warli:
Warli paintings use a very basic graphic vocabulary: A circle, triangle and a square. The paintings were mono-syllabic. The circle and triangle come from their observation of nature; the circle representing the sun and the moon, the triangle derived from mountains and pointed trees.

Warli painting on a wall, inside the house. Made on the event of a wedding.

Design Resource

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https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Sohrai:
Sohrai is a art form of house painting done during Harvest seasons unlike Khovar art which is done during Marriage seasons. It is considered as sacred ritual tradition and the colorful paintings done Chewed sticks of trees (used in villages to brush their teeth) are used by artists. Water is used to dilute the mixture. Sohrai is said to be following upon similar patterns and styles once used to create other rock arts in the region.

Sohrai Painting.
Source: http://talesofhazaribagh.weebly.com/index.html

Design Resource

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by
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https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Khovar:
This is also considered as sacred ritual tradition (like Sorai art - done in harvest seasons) of painting houses during marriages in villages to mark the bonding. To make Khovar, a coat of black mud which is followed by the coat of white mud ('dudhiya mitti') is applied. After the double coating, a wooden comb-type tool is used to peel of the white layer in certain patterns ultimately revealing the black coat in a pattern as desired.

Khovar Painting.
Source: http://talesofhazaribagh.weebly.com/uploads/9/6/0/7/9607934/7896736.jpg?505

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Kavad:
Kavad also called as "god-boxes" are the portable wooden shrines with multiple folding doors, on which the stories are painted on each panel of the box. Mostly in 80 Cms in height; these boxes are made of light wood. Kaavad with larger size/ ht. are also found. It's the art of storytelling through pictures painted on the boxes. Most of the stories are related to the epics- Life of Krishna, Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Tantras etc. with references to local myths and patrons towards the end.

Kavad.

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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Rangoli:
Rangoli is the decorative forms and patterns made on ground, floors and courtyards during Hindu festivals. It's a folk art from India and is considered as sacred welcoming areas for the Hindu deities. It has passed down from ages and generations which keep the art and tradition alive. These decorative patterns are created with different materials like dry flour, colored rice, sand or even flower petals.

Most of the Indian states has their own way of creating patterns and even are called by different names. For eg. Kolam in Tamil Nadu, Madanae in Rajasthan, Chowkpurna in Northern India, Alpana, Aripana, chowk pujan in Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh respectively. Said to bring 'Good Luck' and purpose being decoration, the Rangoli patterns vary as they reflect traditions, folklore and practices that are unique to each area. Traditionally done by women/ Girls in the family, modern additions have been adapted over the years. The practice of drawing Rangoli is mostly seen during occasions such as festivals, auspicious observances, celebrations, marriages, gatherings etc.

Rangoli.

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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/folk-and-tribal-art

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Indian Tribe Tattoos:
Tattoos play an integral part of life in the tribal society. They signify the social and economical well being of a person. They mark important times in the life of a person and they are the sole things that can be carried back into after life when a person dies. Tattoos have been a medium to ink down literally the history of the society.

Indian Tribe tattoo.
Source: http://farm1.static.flickr.com/151/389044314_ac96872365.jpg

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Mehndi:
Widely practiced in countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; the application of henna as a temporary form of skin decoration is called Mehndi. The word 'Mehndi' is derived from the Sanskrit word Mendhika. The uses of Turmeric & Mehndi are described in the earliest Vedic ritual books and are the Vedic customs which represent outer and inner sun symbolically. Vedic customs are centered around the idea of "awakening the inner light".

Mehndi.

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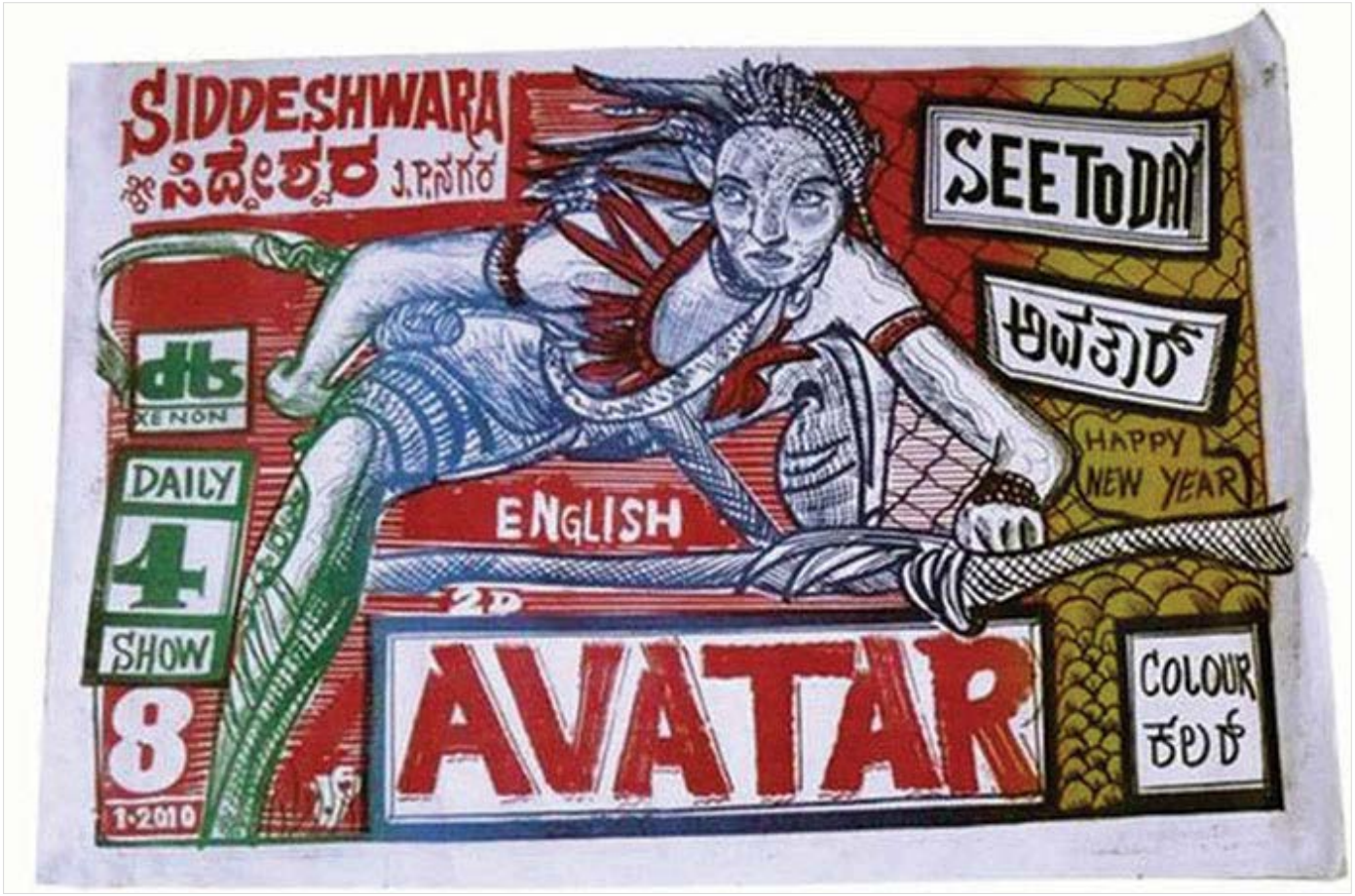
Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/recent-times

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Recent Times

Movie Posters:
Movie posters as seen alongside are no new sight for any person from rural India. Posters as seen here are done at the city itself and mostly in two or three colors. The size of the poster is usually around that of an A1 standard sheet. These posters are done as solution to expensive print posters.



Movie poster in rural India
Source: http://www.feltandwire.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/avatar.jpg

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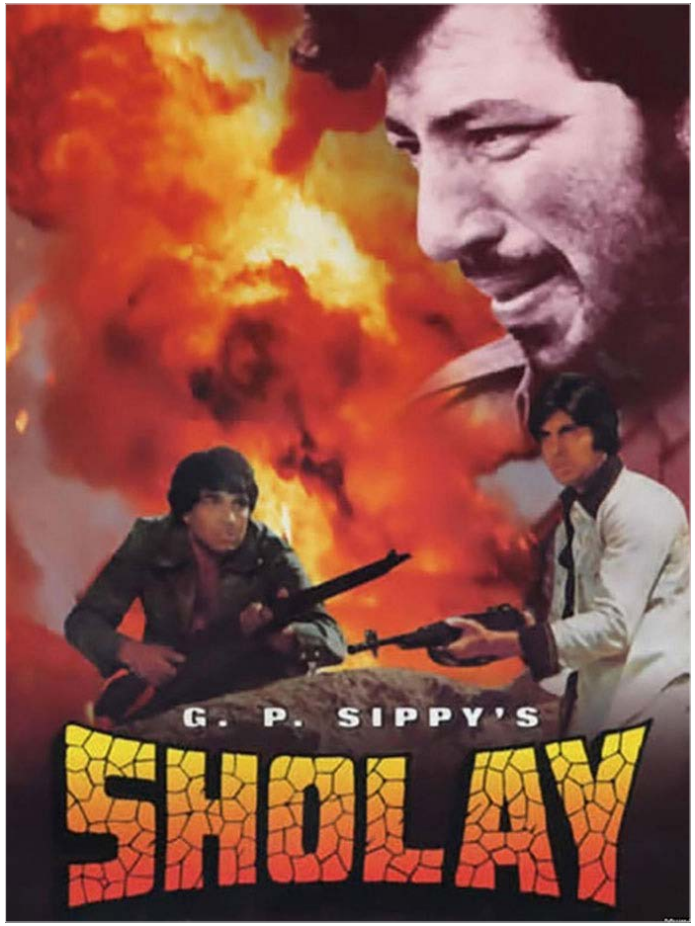
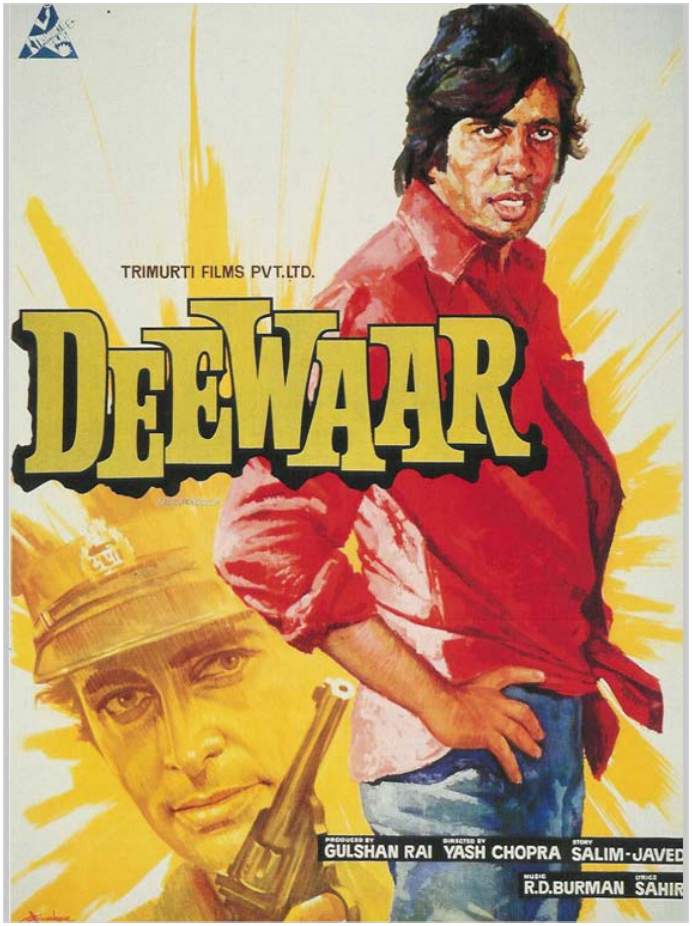
1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Movie posters of Bollywood movies are quite an example of various explorations in display typography and vibrant use of colours. Many artists made their living by painting these posters and large hoardings of the movies. These posters are still in demand these days as work of vintage art and sold at pawn shops. An original poster can cost quite a fortune.



Sholay poster
[Image Source]



Deewar poster.

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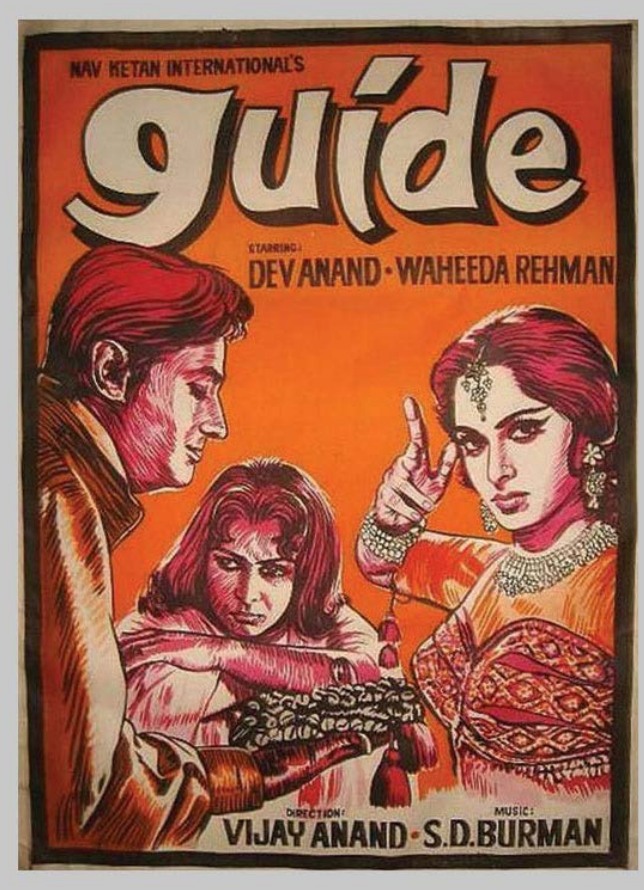
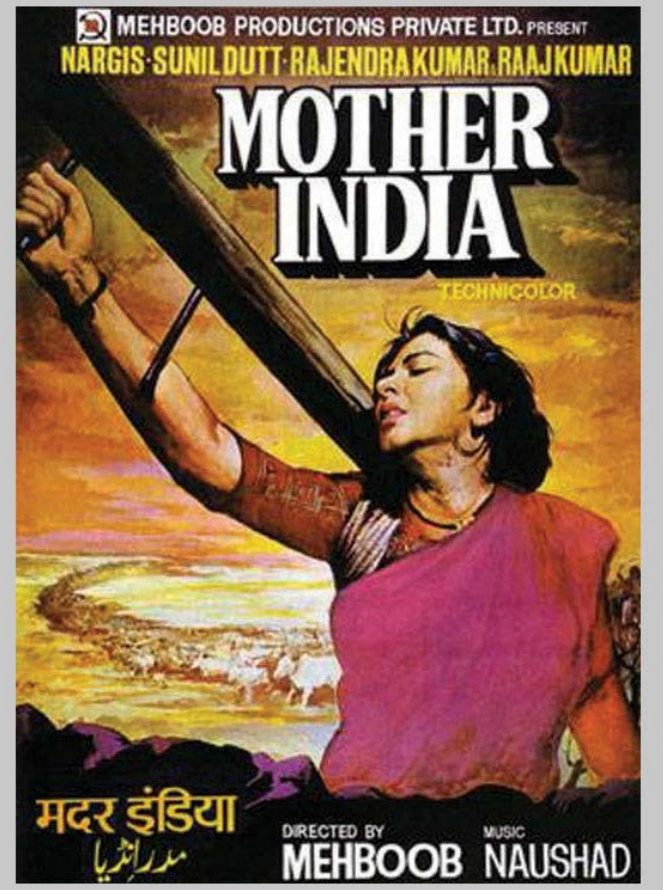
Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/recent-times

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details



Guide poster.



Mother India poster.

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History of Graphic Arts in India

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IDC, IIT Bombay

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1. Introduction
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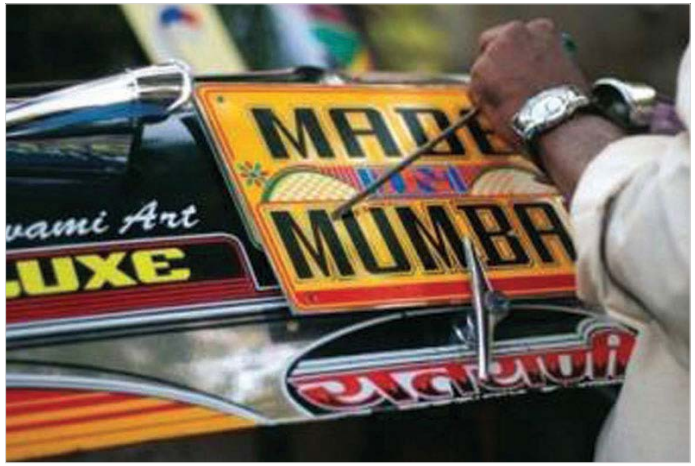
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Graphic on Automobiles:
Graphics on trucks across India can be seen. These graphics usually have some basic elements such as the Horn OK Please written at the back. Other words include Use dipper at night, Public carrier and National Permit. In a way these trucks have their identity painted onto them as they travel all round the country. The taxis at Mumbai have a lot of Typographic elements mostly hand painted but, now they have ventures into colored vinyl sheets.



Graphic on the back of a car.
[Image Source]

Graphic on the back of a truck.
[Image Source]

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2. Paintings
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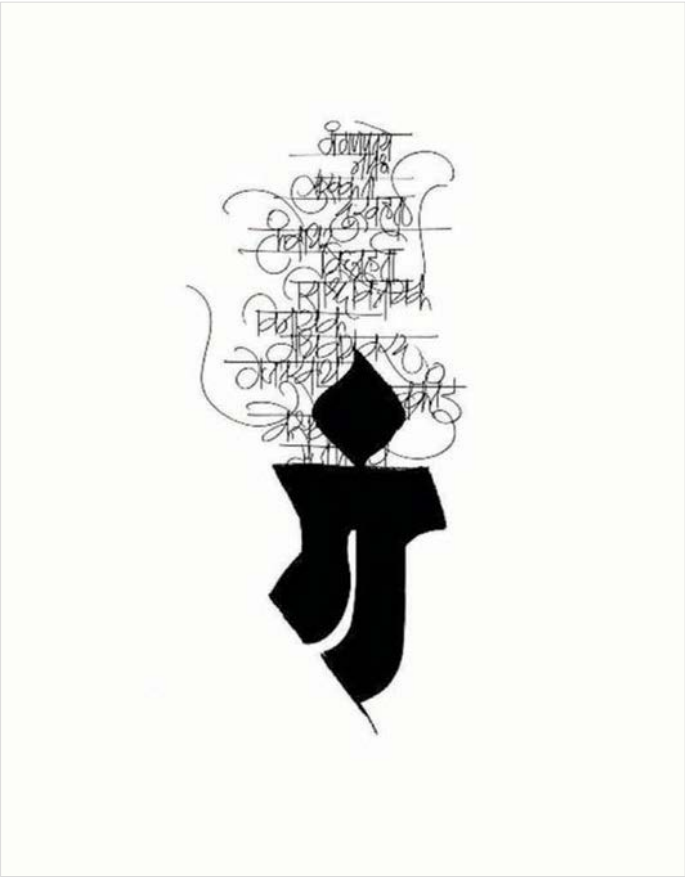
6. Contact Details

Calligraphy:
The work of two calligraphers is commendable to the contribution to Indian Graphic Design namely, Late Prof. RK Joshi and now, Achut Palav.



Calligraphy by Achut Palav.
[Image Source]

Calligraphy by RK Joshi.
[Image Source]

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2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
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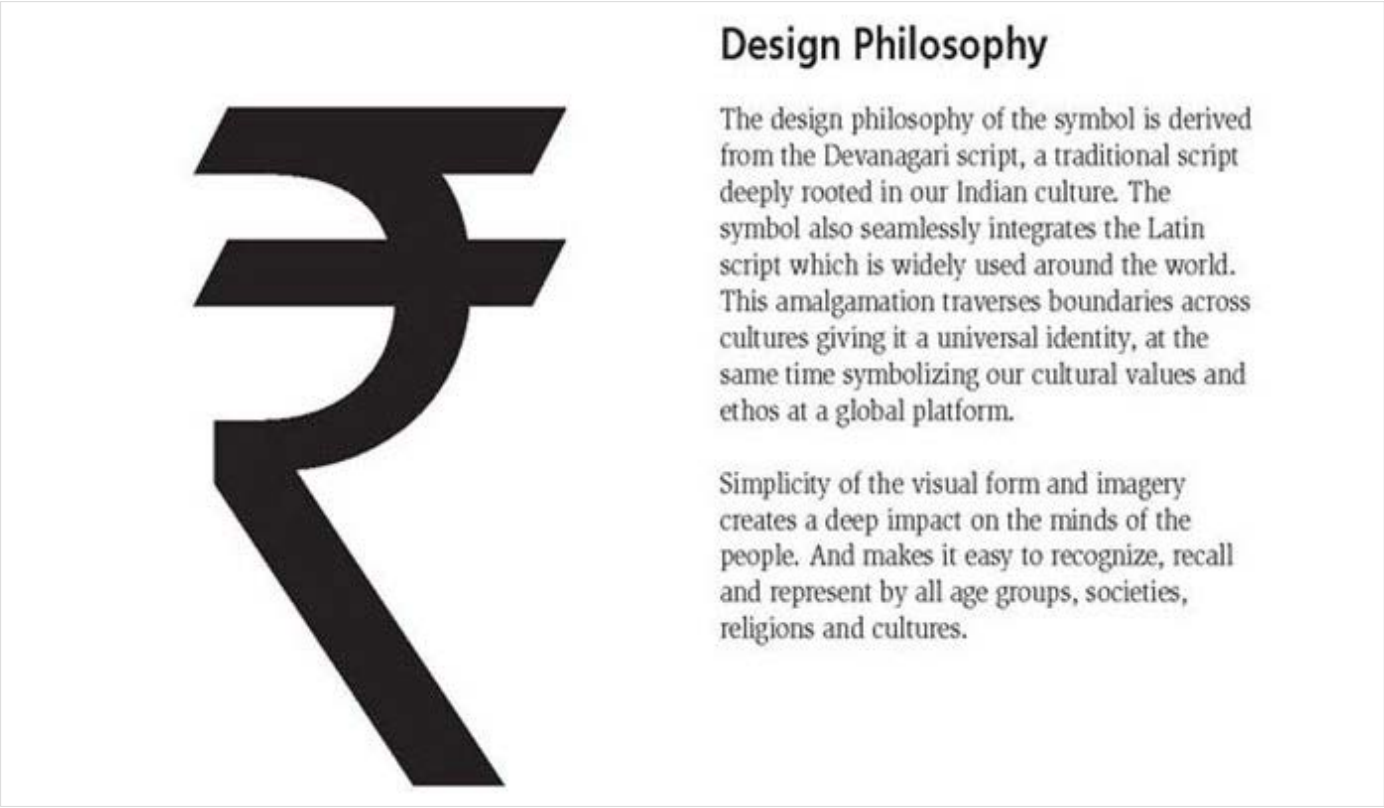
Typography:

• Indian Rupee:
Uday Kumar designed the Currency symbol for Indian Rupee, thus giving a visual image to the Indian Currency.


Design Philosophy
The design philosophy of the symbol is derived from the Devanagari script, a traditional script deeply rooted in our Indian culture. The symbol also seamlessly integrates the Latin script which is widely used around the world. This amalgamation traverses boundaries across cultures giving it a universal identity, at the same time symbolizing our cultural values and ethos at a global platform.
Simplicity of the visual form and imagery creates a deep impact on the minds of the people. And makes it easy to recognize, recall and represent by all age groups, societies, religions and cultures.

Rupee Symbol

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2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
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• **Hand Painted Works:**
Hnif Qureshi is an artist trying to preserve the Hand painted works of the sign board painters.

Type design by Hanif Quereshi
[Image Source]

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2. Paintings
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4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

• **Contemporary Indic Types:**
Prof. Mahendra C. Patel is the foremost Type Designer of India. Recently awarded the Guttenberg Award for outstanding work in Contemporary Indic Types, his works are commendable.

Type design by Mahendra Patel
[Image Source]

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3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

• Indic Typography:
Prof Mukund Gokhle's work in Devanagari is also one of the milestones for Indic Typography as he was the person to standardize the script and did the nomenclature for the same.

Work, Prof. Mukund Gokhle
[Image Source]

Comics:

• Pran:
Pran Kumar Sharma (born August 15, 1938), better known as Pran, is one of the most successful Indian cartoonists, best known as the creator of Chacha Chaudhary (1971).

The man who created that blockbuster series is none other than Pran, who is considered as the Father of Indian Comics, Because he was the one who in 1960, created first indigenous cartoons strips having Indian characters and based on local themes. Before that all comics were imported from foreign countries.

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3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
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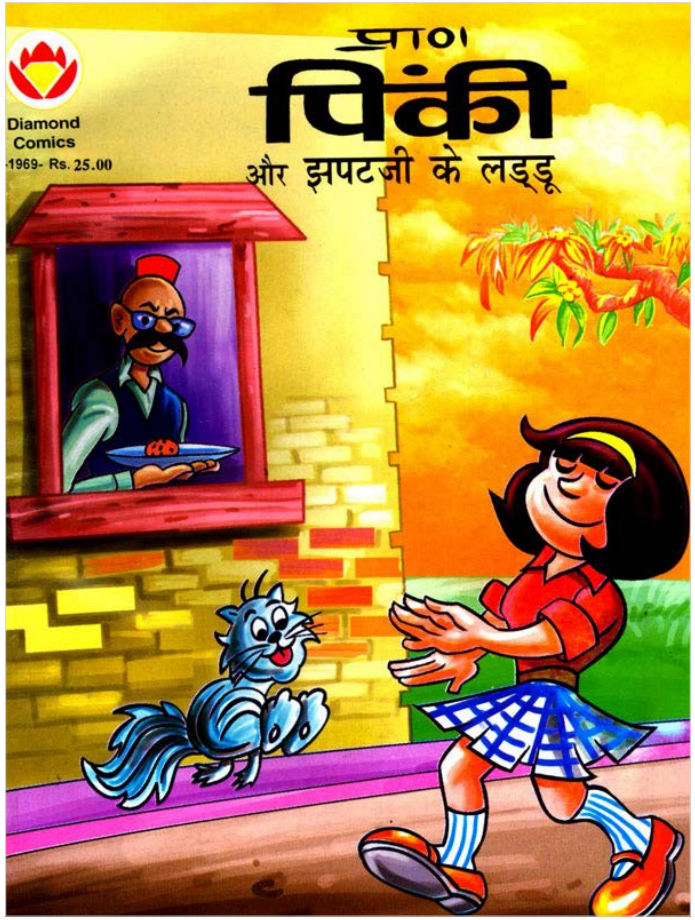
Chacha Chaudhary.



Pinki Comics.

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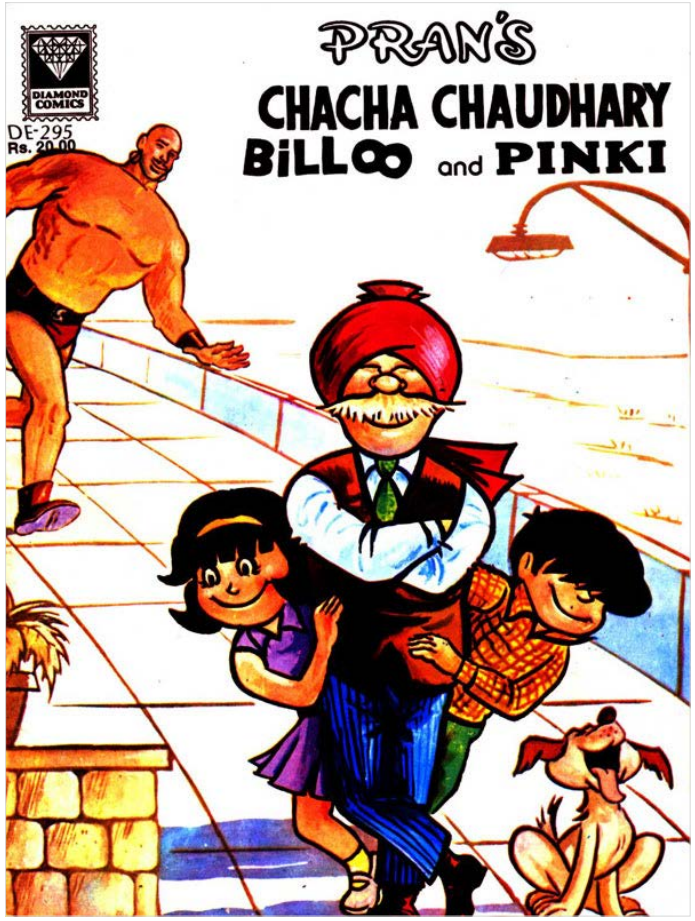
5. References
6. Contact Details



Pran's Chacha Choudhary, Billoo and Pinki.

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5. References
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• **R. K. Laxman:**
Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Laxman (born 24 October 1921, Mysore, India) is an Indian cartoonist, illustrator, and humorist. He is widely regarded as India's greatest-ever cartoonist and is best known for his creation The Common Man.

The Common Man is the creation of author and cartoonist R K Laxman. For over a half of a century, the Common Man has represented the hopes, aspirations, troubles and perhaps even foibles of the average Indian, through a daily cartoon strip, "You Said It" in The Times of India. The comic was started in 1951.
When Laxman began to draw cartoons in The Times of India, he attempted to represent different states and cultures in India. In the rush to meet deadlines, he began to draw fewer and fewer background characters, until finally he found only one remaining - the now-familiar Common Man. The Common Man generally acts as a silent witness to all the action in the comic.

Common man by R K Laxman

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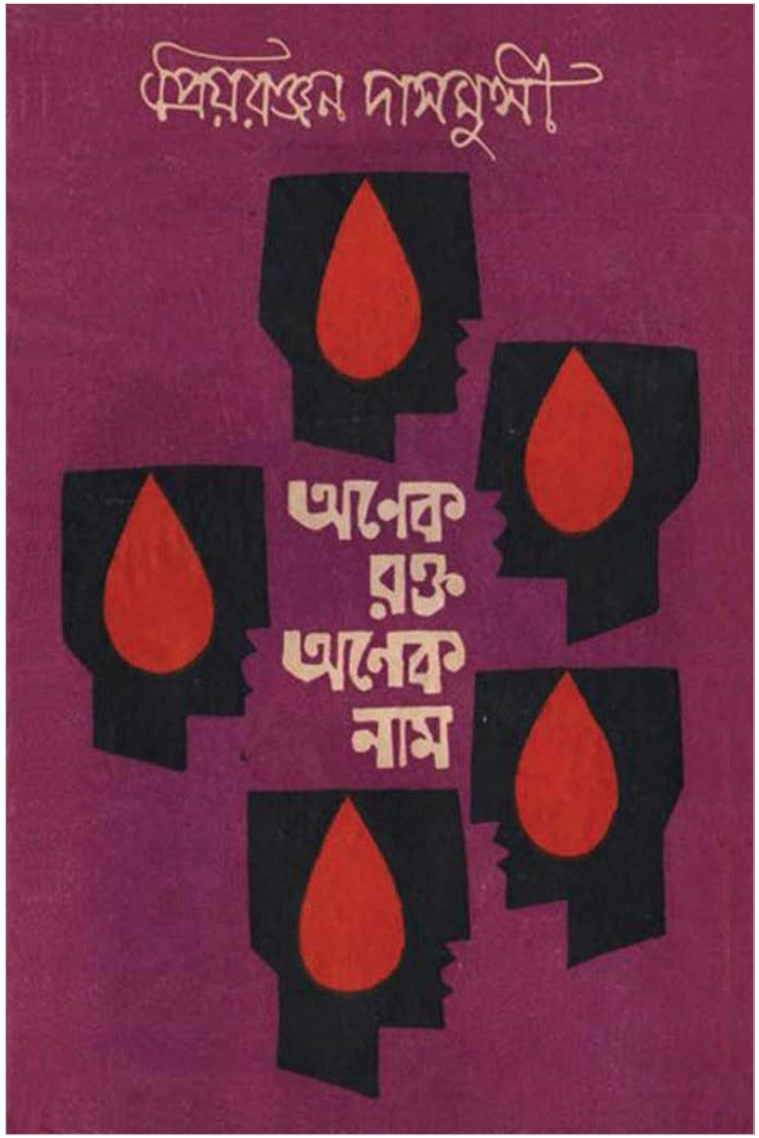
Book Cover:
With the advent of print in India, the county saw various explorations in book covers in cheap two or three color screen prints. These book covers were the representation of the layout and graphic design work at those times.



Book covers

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Daily Commodities:

• Food:
Parle G seems to be synonymous with snack time essentials in Indian household. The Parle name conjures up fond memories across the length and breadth of the country. After all, since 1929, the people of India have been growing up on Parle biscuits & sweets. Parle-G is the world's largest selling brand of biscuits originally packed in the wax paper pack; today it is available in a contemporary, premium BOPP pack with attractive side fins. The product has changed but the packaging design with its cute baby face and the yellow orange colour has surely come a long way.

Parle G Biscuit Packet

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3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
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• **Beverage:**
Frooti is the brand names for the summer beverage in India. The graphic of these two also can be seen as a landmark of Graphic Design in India.

Rasna.

Evolution of Frooti packaging over the ages.
[Image Source]

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• **Firecrackers:**
The firecracker packets are quite a treat in terms of Graphics portrayed on them. They can be seen as the actual Graphic hitting the people in masses designed by the people. The iconography, layouts and the portraits are unique to the country and the segment of products Similar to this is also the incense stick packets.

Graphics on the firecrackers
[Image Source]

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3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

• **Matchboxes:**
Graphics on the Match boxes in India.

Graphics on matchboxes
[Image Source]

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2. Paintings
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4. Recent Times
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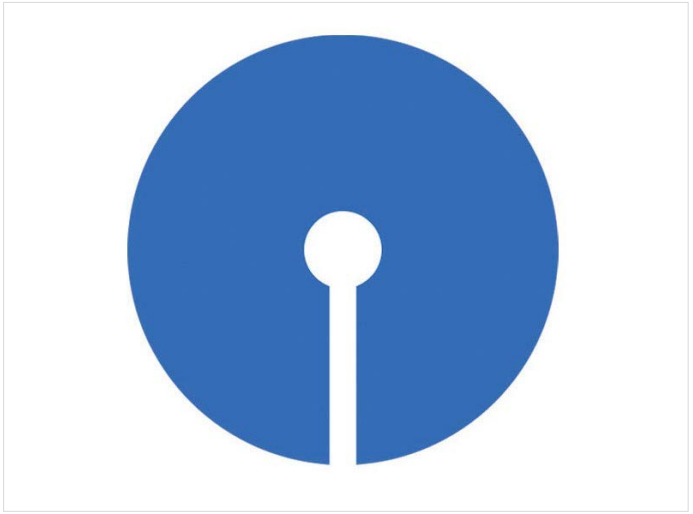
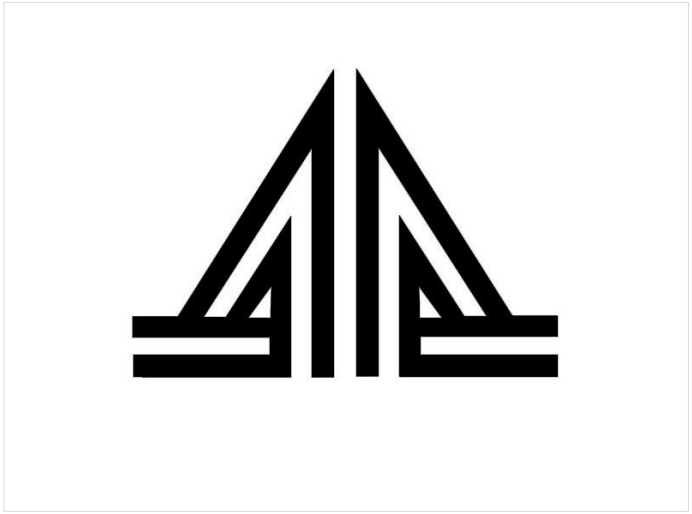
Indian Logo Design:

• Some of the good logos in India:

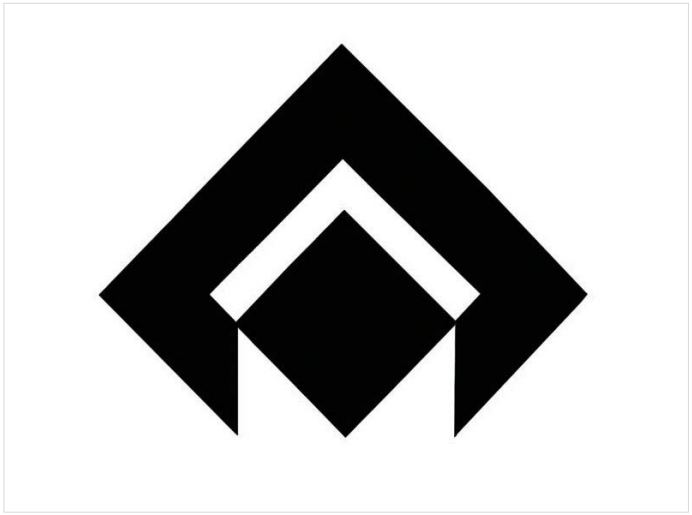


SBI logo.



Airport Authority of India Logo.

Doordarshan logo.



Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) logo.

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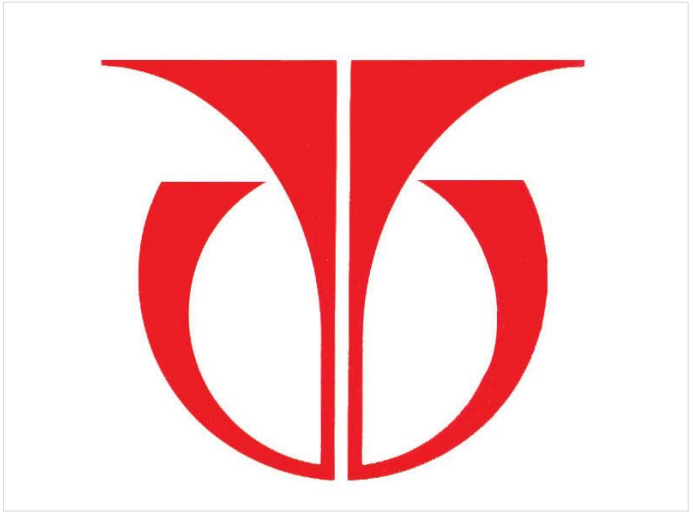

TITAN logo.

Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) logo.

1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

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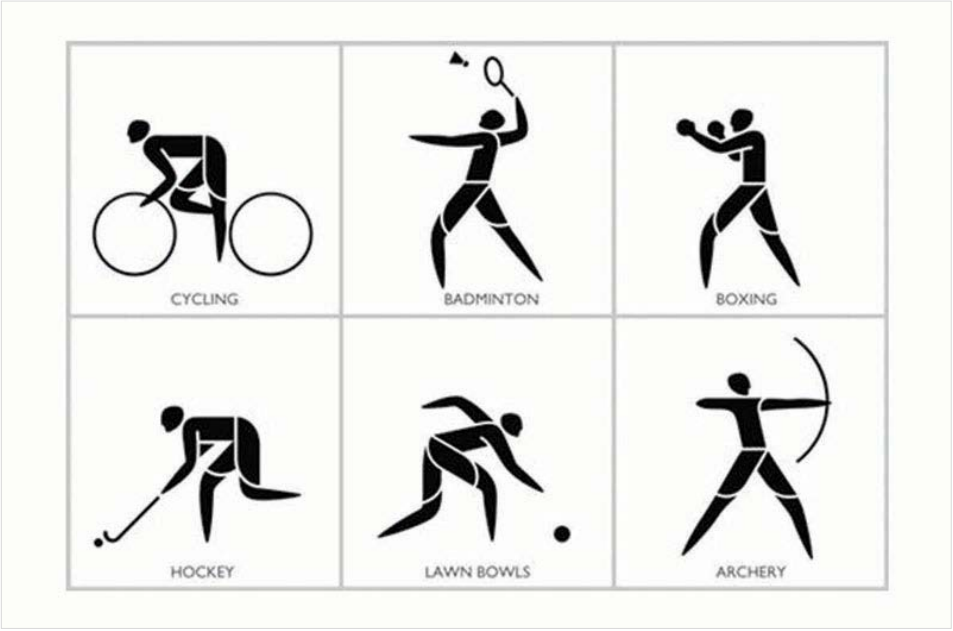
6. Contact Details

Some of the Good Logos in India in More Recent Times:

• Commonwealth Games pictograms by Idiom Design, Bangalore:

Commonwealth Games 2010 logo.



Ideogram for Commonwealth Games. [Image Source]

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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
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5. References
6. Contact Details

• The recently designed India Design Mark:

India Design Mark
[Image Source]

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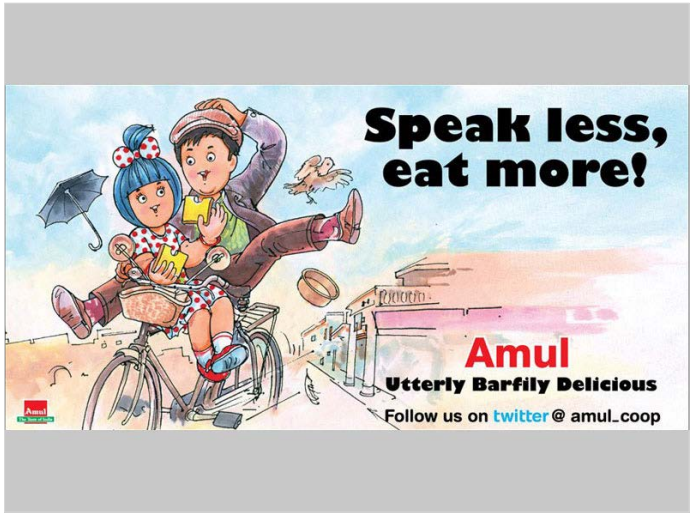
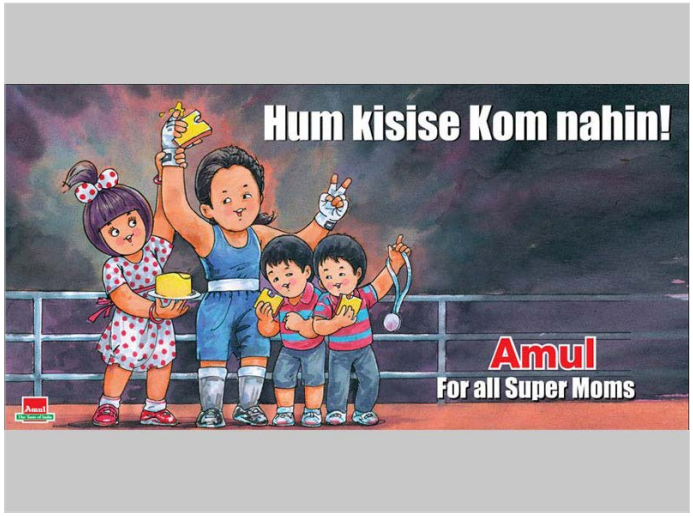
• Amul:

Amul Logo.

Amul girl.



Amul Advertisements.
[Image Source]



Amul Advertisements.
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1. Introduction
2. Paintings
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Protest Art:
Protest art is new to India. A few of the noticeable ones are the Anna Hazare campaign - where everyone wore a cal stating he/ she was Anna.

The "I am Anna Hazare cap"
[Image Source]

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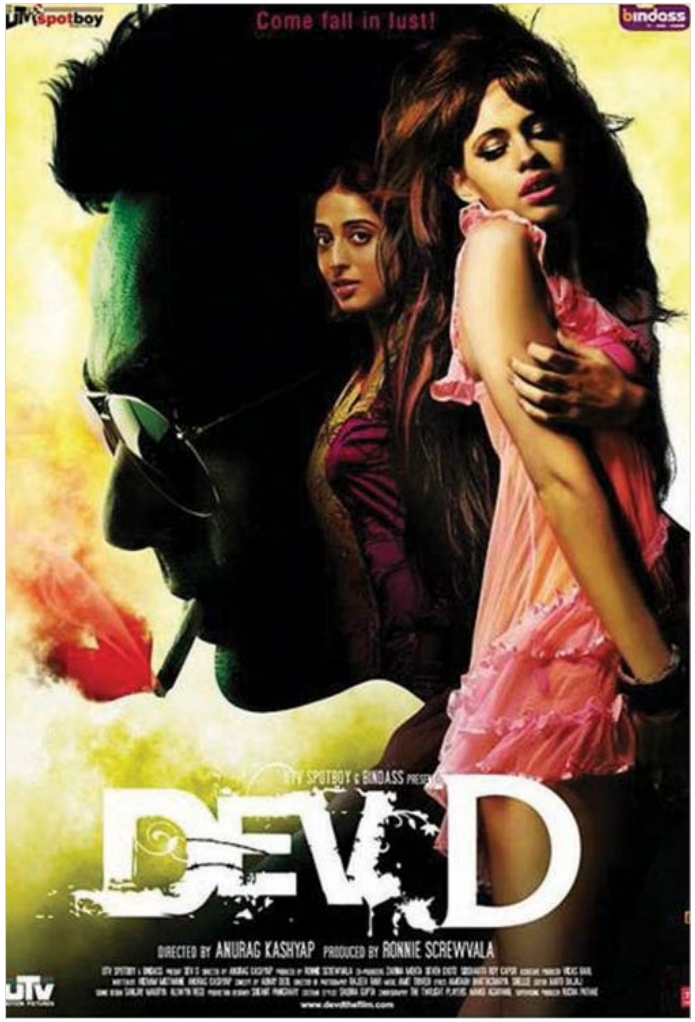
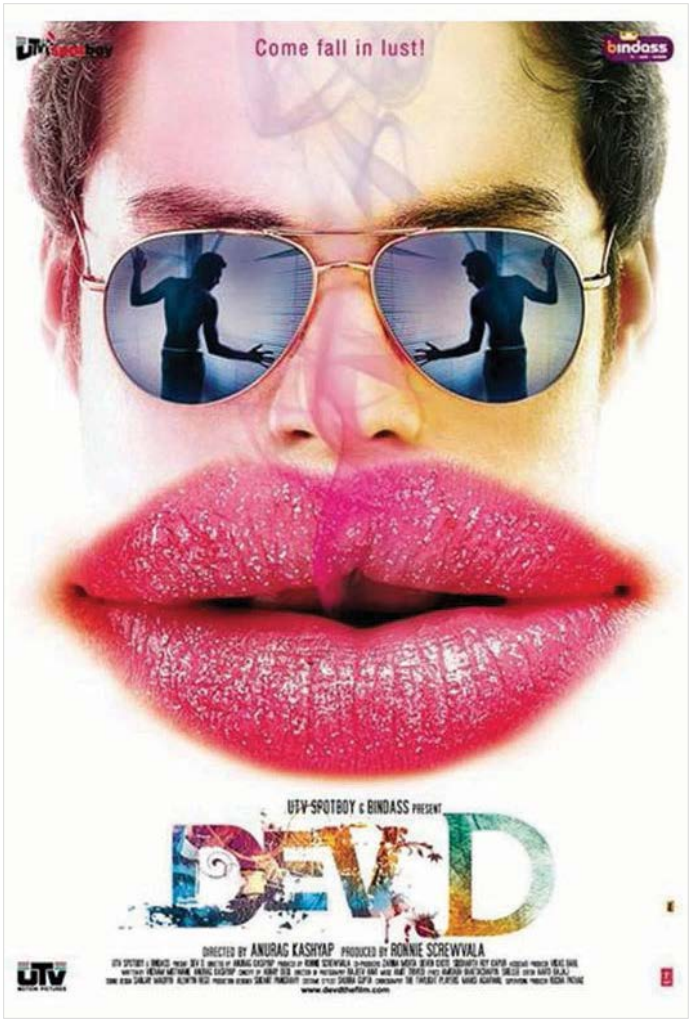
3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

Poster Layout- Contemporary:

• Poster Design by Marching Ants:



Movie poster DevD.



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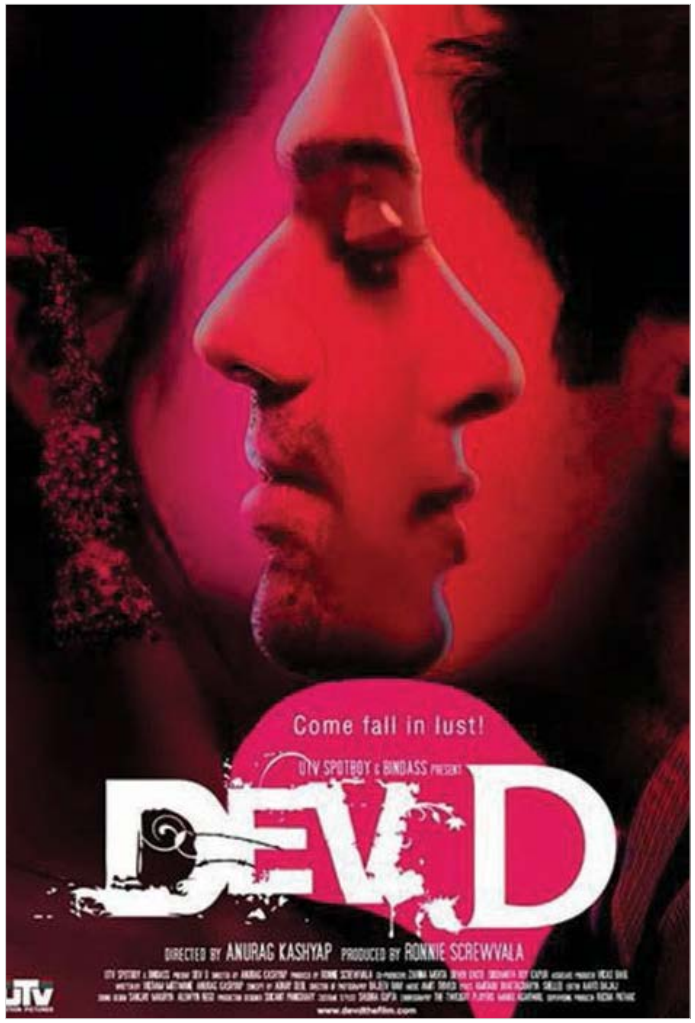

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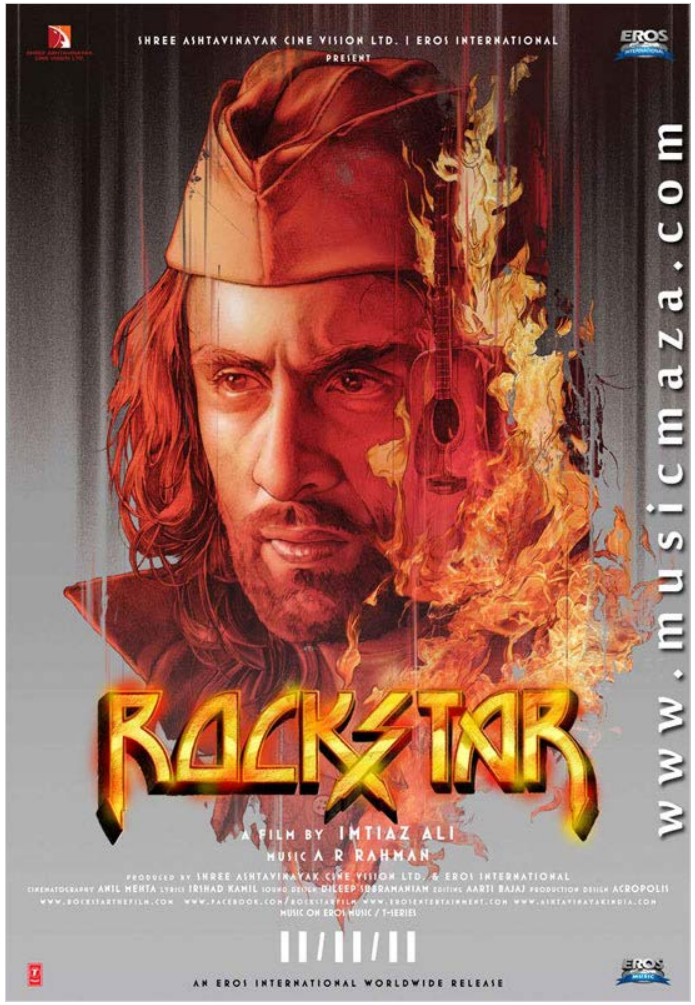
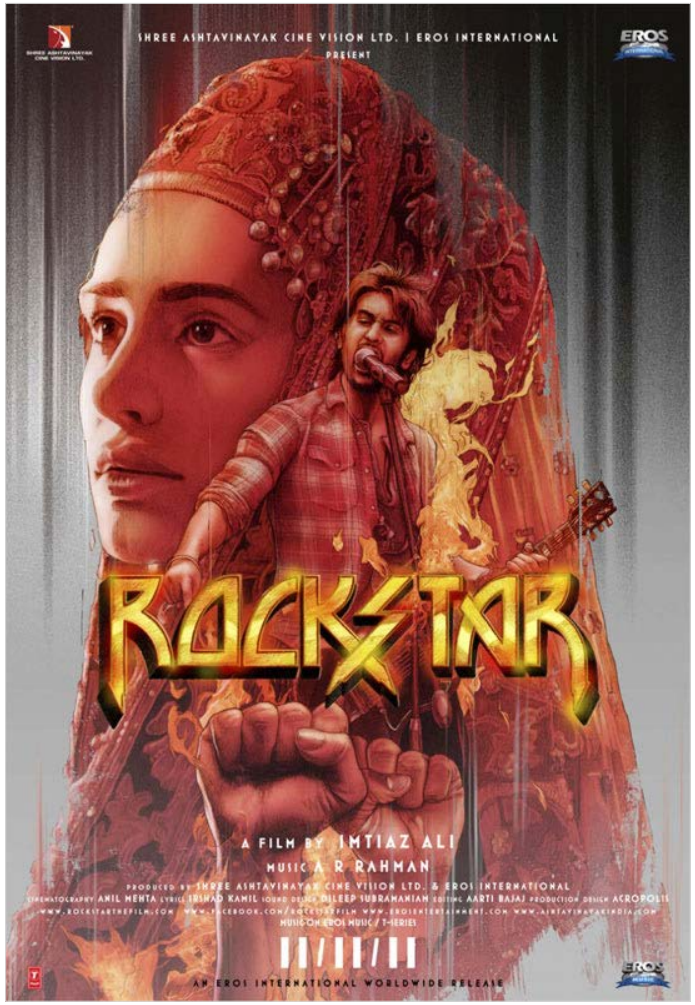
4. Recent Times
5. References
6. Contact Details

• Poster Design by Grzegorz Domaradzki from Poznan, Poland:



Movie Poster Rockstar.



Movie Poster Rockstar.

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3. Folk and Tribal Art
4. Recent Times
5. References
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Contemporary Graphic Design based on Indian Theme:

• The Elephant Company:

The Elephant Company
[Image Source]

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• Chumbak:

Chumbak.
[Image Source]

Chumbak.
[Image Source]

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Chumbak.
[Image Source]

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• Chimpwear:

Chimpwear
[Image Source]

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• Sanjay Patel [Contemporary]:
Sanjay Patel is an animator and storyboard artist for Pixar Animation Studios, where he has worked on numerous movies. He recently launched his new book on Hindu deities.

Durga from Sanjay Patel's The Big Poster of Hindu Deities.
[Image Source]

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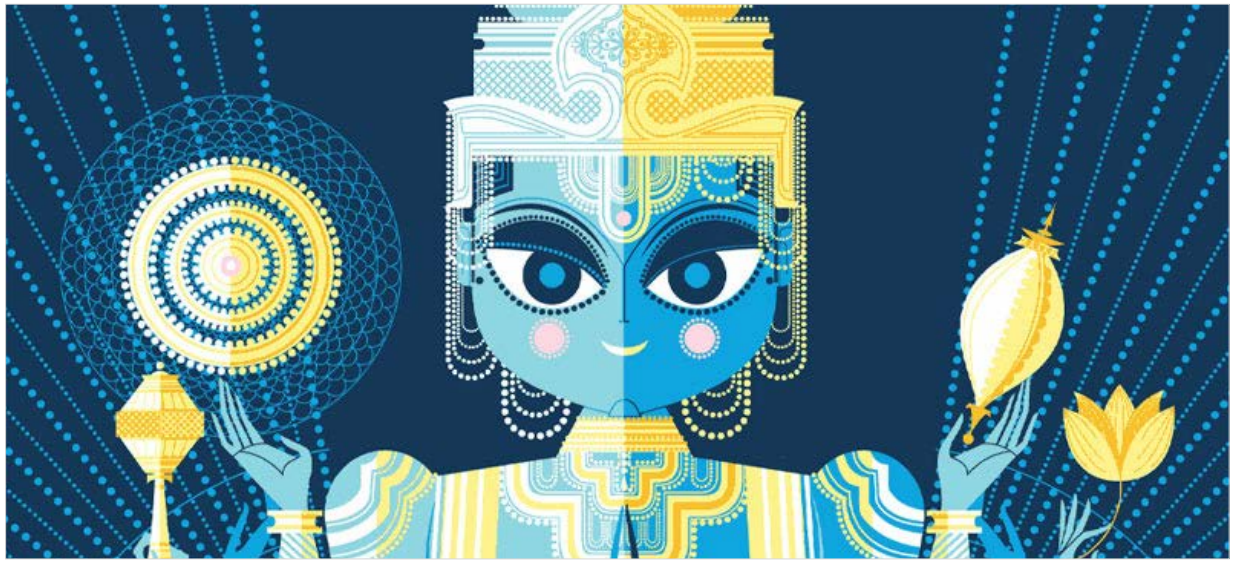
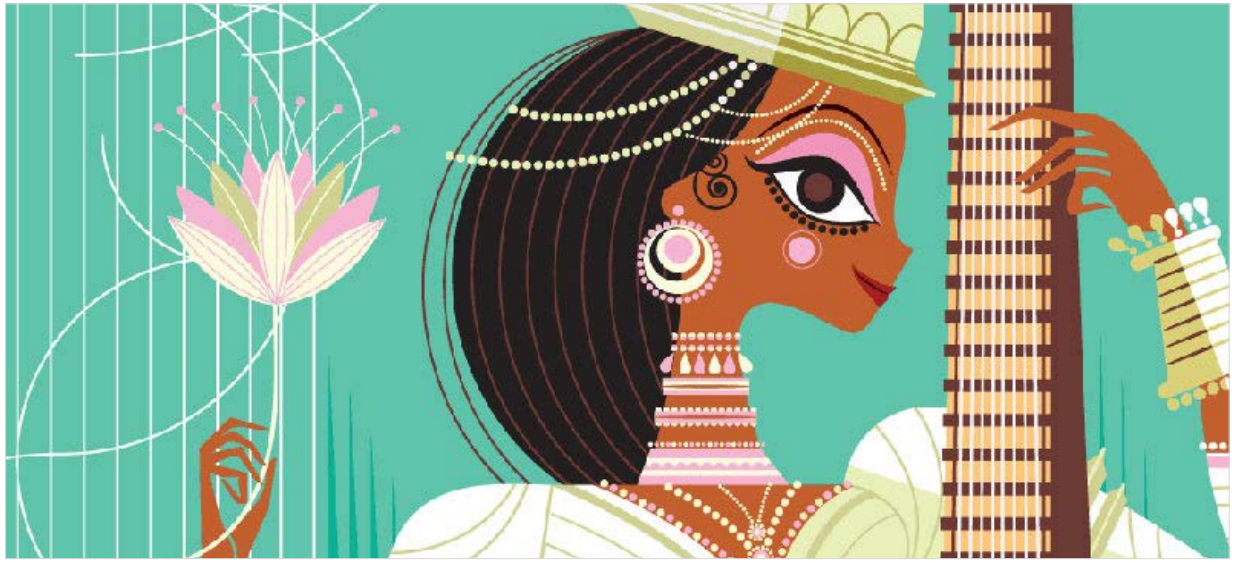


Vishnu from Sanjay Patel's The Big Poster of Hindu Deities.
[Image Source]



Saraswati from Sanjay Patel's The Big Poster of Hindu Deities.
[Image Source]

Design Resource

History of Graphic Arts in India

An Overview of the Indian Legacy of Graphic Design

by
Aman Rupesh Xaxa
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/history-graphic-art-india/recent-times

1. Introduction
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An illustration from Sanjay Patel's graphic novel Ramayana - Divine Loophole.
[Image Source]

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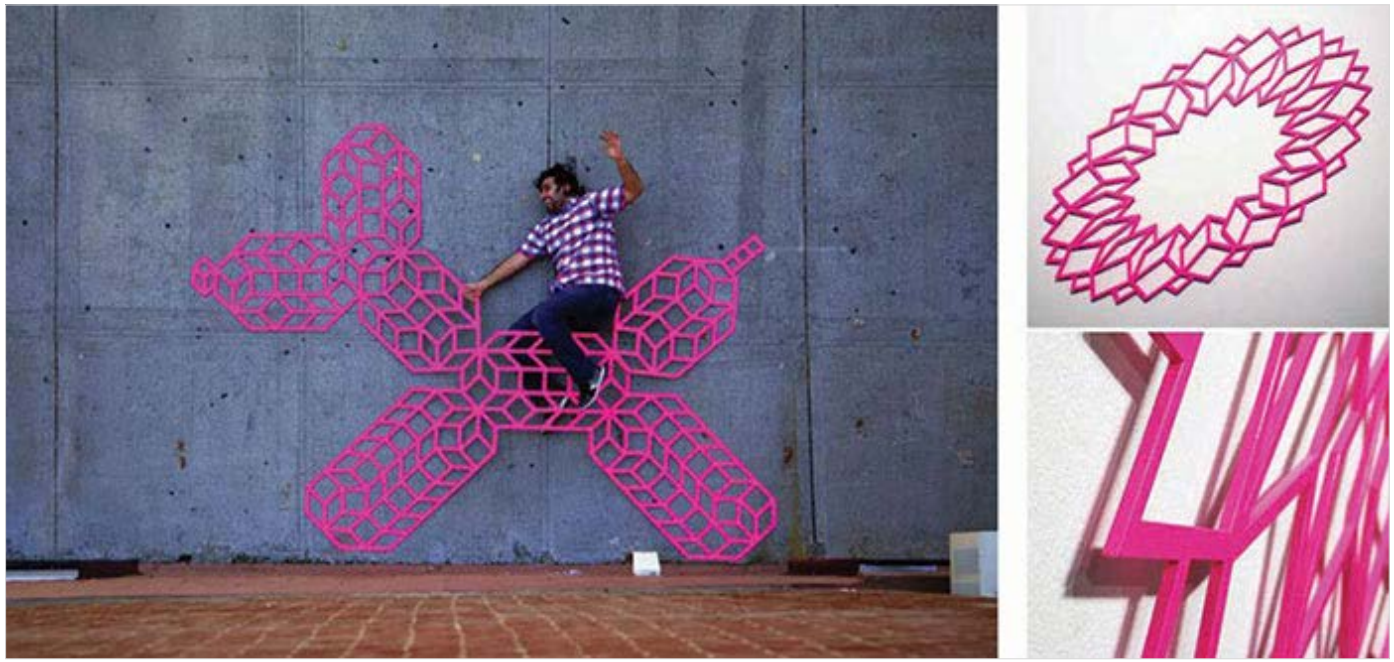
• Akash Nilhani [Contemporary]:
Akash Nilhani is an artist who usually works consists of usually isometric rectangles and squares in New York. To highlight the unexpected contours and elegant geometry of the city itself.



Sculpture/Painting Akash Nilhani
[Image Source]

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Aman Rupesh Xaxa at IDC, IIT Bombay.

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